

RISING FROM COVID-19: PRIVATE SCHOOLS' READINESS AND RESPONSE AMIDST A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Schools' stakeholders are the most affected during this time of the pandemic. They are mostly the ones at a loss and are the ones sacrificing, may it be either academically, financially, or both. The different gathered data aimed to provide clarity on the issues and provide propositions on how to conduct the schools' organic functions, possibly during and after the pandemic. In this study, a total of 220 participants came from 44 different schools. The study employed a concurrent-triangulation research design in which an online survey was sent to the participants. Also, teachers coming from international schools and schools outside the Philippines were contacted to have them share their experiences in regards to how their schools handle the situation. Lastly, document analysis was also utilized as a data-gathering procedure. Hence, a model focusing on six factors, namely: ICT Literacy Training, Stakeholder's Educational Equity, Re-engineering of Teacher's Mindset, Pedagogical Innovation, Re-designing of the Curriculum, and Re-evaluation of Assessments and Grading System was proposed.

Keywords: Pandemic Education, COVID-19, Concurrent-Triangulation, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Pandemics are one of the most devastating realities that the world could ever face. It could affect many of the sectors in what is perceived to be normal. Historically, the world has tackled different kinds of it; earliest record dated back 430 BC at Athens, Greece, during the Peloponnesian War (Cartwright, 2014) which documents described its symptoms to be typhoid fever. Since then, numerous diseases all over the world have been documented; 165 AD suspected smallpox, which affected the Huns, Germans, and the Romans. In 250 AD, the Cyprian Plague described being diarrhea-like impacted Ethiopia, Rome, Egypt, and countries north of it. From then on, there was the first

recorded bubonic plague, leprosy, and the famous black death (History, 2019).

The black death started the response that the world knew today as quarantine in which Yan et al. (2007) expounded as a procedure that is one of the most effective measures that the world can have in case of highly infectious diseases. Though thousands and thousands fell during the Spanish flu, implementing the 40 days of isolation was copied to control different infections. The implementation of quarantine during the three waves of Spanish flu has temporarily closed down public and private schools (Martini et al., 2019). It was giving a more definite reason to replicate the same procedures in possible future pandemics to prevent its spread. Presently, COVID-19, a new

pandemic, has affected the whole world, closing down all sectors. It has placed schools on hold, which made stakeholders lost academically. The Philippines was not spared from such a dilemma in which many concerns were raised. Matters such as first, students' learning, since it is primarily the concern of schools, Reimers and Schleicher (2020) expressed their concerns in providing necessary social isolation should not disrupt learning. There should be a standing strategy to allow the students to learn. Second, the continuation of education, in which the Department of Education (DepEd) has banked on the use of the digital world and the reduction of class size as possible solutions (Cator, 2020). In the same article, DepEd also expressed its concern on the opening of classes this coming Academic Year 2020-2021, raising apprehensions from the educational community on how to conduct classes in accordance with what everyone understood to be as the "new normal." Third of this is on curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the grading system, wherein Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) stated that these are the critical points for teachers in pushing through with their mission during the pandemic.

Will (2020) described the challenges that teachers experience once instruction turns to the digital world. He expounded that some teachers needed to go to empty parking lots of the school to access more reliable Internet connectivity. Internet connectivity in the Philippines is analogous to the hardships that the teachers' experience as stated by the author. Hence, the full transition to the digital world will be challenging for the instructors. Aside from that, the Philippine K-12 Curriculum needs to have re-evaluation and re-alignment as to what the new normal expects. Thus, assessments and grading might change as well. In accordance with these, the DepEd calls for the simplification of the curriculum focusing only on the most essential (Rita, 2020).

With these, the primary purpose of the study is to survey the response and readiness of the private schools, gather existing practices from schools that what the world perceives to be as the new normal as their standard, and

formulate possible approaches that institutions may use in order to continue providing quality education to their stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to look into the school's readiness and response to COVID-19 as to its pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. Specifically, the study looked into:

1. Perceived reforms of the teachers in the following aspects:
 - 1.1 Curriculum;
 - 1.2 Pedagogy; and
 - 1.3 Assessments and Grading System
2. The preparedness and responses of the institution in terms of the stakeholder's:
 - 2.1 ICT Literacy;
 - 2.2 Owned devices; and
 - 2.3 Internet Connectivity
3. Mindset of the teachers
4. A recommendation of a possible model for the "new normal"

METHODOLOGY

The study explored the readiness and responses of the institutions and likewise that of the students and the teachers who owned gadgets, have internet stability, and were proficient in using technology. It will explore the possible reforms that the teachers suggest in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment (PCA).

With this, 220 randomly selected participants from 44 schools joined the study. A revised survey adapted from Almario and Austria's (2020) paper was conducted to look into the different factors of the study. Since the study utilized an online survey, the study was only limited to the number of participants; however, it could be increased in succeeding studies. The participants' identification remained anonymous and were only used in gathering pertinent data of the study.

Responses of selected individuals from schools whose PCA was possibly equipped in responding to COVID-19, both during and post-COVID-19 were isolated and analyzed further to identify the best practices that schools may adapt. Electronic mail was used to communicate with individuals. With this, the study employed a concurrent-triangulation design in which both quantitative and qualitative data were deemed vital to understand the condition.

To interpret the qualitative data, the thematic analysis was used, and an inter-coder was asked to check the generated themes. Moreover, the quantitative results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The data were triangulated and were analyzed using the Convergence Learning Theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants viewed the pandemic as both a challenge and an opportunity to look at the current status of the whole academe. In their perspective, the primary key points that arose during the situation were focused on curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, grading system, training, mindset, and equity.

1. Perceived Reforms of Teachers

1.1 Curriculum. The new K-12 curriculum has tried to decongest the topics offered to the Filipino students. Also, it aimed to boost the global competitiveness of the students by conducting student-centered classes (Adarlo & Jackson, 2017). In Adarlo and Jackson's (2017) description, DepEd envisions its learners to be prepared as these individuals face the trials of the 21st Century. However, in their investigation, the Philippine K-12 curriculum caters to what they termed to be as "globalization from below" and "globalization from above." This, in their context, described it as an approach to amend social inequalities, which was evident in the country.

As the teachers facilitate what was written, it has opened realities to some of the

students' difficulties, as described by Fatulan and Mamhot (2018). In their paper, they have explained that whenever a student is faced with numerous and bulky workloads, they experienced anxiety and performed less. Also, it was not only students who are affected by the current K-12 curriculum. The teachers also have challenges in the implementation of curriculum policies (Bongco & David, 2020). In their paper, they have made mention that education is demanding but still needs to comply with its call for socio-political, economic, technological, and academic facets.

Under COVID-19, teachers and students are expected to still interact with each other and this might be the same situation even after Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). In the participants' point of view, they consider that the present curriculum needs to undergo "restructuring," in a way that the essential parts will not be removed but would need "modifications." The modifications that may take place in the "present curriculum would involve analysis of the competencies that may be done in the schedule" as adjusted to what pedagogy will be implemented by the teachers, more so the school. From the perspective of other participants, "there should be re-designing to address equity, social learning, and focusing on what should be learned in the new normal." In this case, the re-designing of the curriculum would focus more on becoming outcome-based, and modular in approach. In which the content would still be focused but highly innovative and should concentrate on the skills needed in life, and contextualized. However, due to social distancing as required to be practiced during and after the pandemic, Reimers and Schleicher (2020) have proposed the re-prioritizing of the curriculum goals more than anything else. Thus, the unwrapping of the different competencies to be taken in the new standard-setting and contextualized.

1.2 Pedagogy. Almario and Austria (2020), have presented different learning models both under Remote Learning (i.e., Synchronous, Asynchronous, Hybrid, Modified Hybrid) and



Blended Learning (i.e., Station Rotation, Lab Rotation, Individual Rotation, Flipped Classroom, A la carte Model, Flex Model, and Enriched Virtual). Wherein the participants were asked to determine which of the following models will be the best to be used.

Table 1
Perceived Best Model of Teaching

Model	Percentage (%)
A la Carte Model	1
Synchronous Learning Model	4.8
Asynchronous Learning Model	6.7
Flex Model	11.4
Hybrid Learning	19
Flipped Classroom	26.7
Enriched Virtual Learning	30.5
TOTAL	100

The table shows that based from the participants an Enriched Virtual Learning which is described as a close model of remote learning wherein the students are allowed to accomplish their work either online, offline, off-campus, and may also attend to a face-to-face class, this model may be considered as a way to continue education during ECQ (Almario & Austria, 2020). This was regarded as the best model though some participants recommended the use of asynchronous and synchronous learning models, as virtual technology through video conferencing discussion may push through only if resources are available. Enriched virtual learning may be possible and successful if a specific date, time, session for every module will be communicated and agreed upon by the students.

1.3 Assessments and grading systems. In another perspective, assessments and grading systems may also be a dilemma in which when the curriculum is re-designed will have to undergo re-evaluation as well. Schools in the Metro were used to using pen and paper exams wherein there were quizzes and major exams being conducted every quarter/semester. However, because of the pandemic, some may change in how teachers conduct their assessments. If they are to result in online,

“Google Forms” may be used and transitioning to an online assessment will “save paper, time, and money.” It has other advantages that the participants see, “assessments now can be taken anywhere, anytime,” “it becomes more engaging,” and “may focus on performance-based assessments rather than content-based.”

In as much as it offers advantages, turning into an online assessment may put the “integrity of the students” in jeopardy. Since there was no one watching them and honesty might be questioned, and the validity and credibility of the outputs probed, home school teachers suggest a “blended type of learning, wherein the students will use a module in their studies and have them take the exams at school.” In addition to these, “grades may not be about everything” since many may transit into a “mastery-based exams.”

2. The preparedness and responses of the institution in terms of the stakeholder’s:

2.1 ICT literacy training. The participants’ perspective was almost inclined to transitioning to “online” learning set up. When asked about a possible procedure on how to adapt to a lesson to a no face-to-face interaction, the teachers suggested the exploration of “e-learning” in which they perceived it to be “as the new direction of the educational system.”

Table 2
Learning Management System List as Used by the Participants

ALS	Matrix-LMS
ASTRA-LMS	Moodle
Big Space	NEO-LMS
Blackboard	Quipper School
Canvas	Ranger360
Docebo	SAP-Litmos
Edmodo	Schoology
FLO	SIM
Freejo	Techfactors
Genyo	TEMPUS
Google Classroom	Vsmart
Aralinks	Xepto
LRMDS	Zoom.us
Microsoft TEAMS	Cisco Webex Meetings
Lark Meetings	Cert Central



In addition, they have suggested the use of “various learning management system (LMS) platforms that suits the teachers’ knowledge and capabilities,” not only does it need to be suited for everyone who will be using it; the LMS should “at the same time be a platform with a simple interface and can easily be learned by both teachers and students.”

Since LMS is one of the perceived needed technologies to have the school transit into digitized learning, “teachers need to be fully equipped and knowledgeable in the use of these online tools.” Teachers would “need to adjust and migrate to technology-based teaching.” Hence, if education would “heavily rely on online education,” all stakeholders, parents, students, teachers, and non-academic staff would need to “innovate themselves to learn the new strategies and modes of learning.” On this note, learning will be more accessible for teachers to conduct classes if they were well-trained and well-prepared. Since e-classrooms will be the main venue of education, teachers need to “equip themselves with the demands of technology and its different educational applications and online tools.” Though online learning sounds promising, it will not be successful in the absence of training and preparation.

Upon the closure of schools around the world, Reimers and Schleicher (2020) described the different pedagogies, strategies, and approaches that countries used to provide education. First, was the Argentina course to the use of online resources and materials; second, was the use of remote and online learning through Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams of Australia. While Belgium and Israel were broadcasting using national televisions and had emphasized the purpose and importance of “homeschooling.” China, the first to be affected by COVID-19, had recourse to the use of online teaching as well. This was the same as Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, and Italy. These countries have devoted educational budgets in creating online pages, video tutorials, virtual meetings, and online learning to facilitate education, re-train

Table 3
ICT Literacy Training and Programs suggested by Teachers

Fundamentals of Online Teaching	Conducting Blended Learning
Online Classroom Management	Using E-Classroom Applications and Software
Different Online Resources	Performing Online Assessments
Creating Online Presentations	Video Recording, Editing and Online and Offline Streaming
Designing Authentic Assessments	Modern Ed-Tech
Policies and Guidelines E-Learning Program	Digital and Physical Module Writing Teaching Methods in the Digital Classroom
ICT Integration in the Teaching-Learning Process	Blogging and Vlogging
Basic Use of Computers	Designing Online Learnings
Modifying Teaching in the Digital World	Use of Different Multi-media Channels
Creating Online-based Lessons	Creating Online Modules
Use of Learning Management Systems	Online Assessments and Grading
Distance Learning	Preparing Virtual Lessons
Making Online Quizzes	Online Teaching, Strategies, and Approaches
Gamification	Online Education for Lower School Students
Hybrid Learning	Flexi Learning
Online Instructional Materials Development	Google Suite Training

teachers in the use of different platforms (e.g., Microsoft Office 365, Microsoft TEAMS). In their



paper, they have described that even in the presence of unusual online movement, 90 per cent of their participants have perceived the continuity of academic learning of students as very challenging. Hence, different pedagogies were being studied to identify what best fits the community.

On the other hand, the study’s participants showed that students on average were “competent” in using the google search engine, sending, receiving, navigating through email, using MS Office, using collaborative tools, and using video conferencing tools. At the same time, they were “proficient” in using chat. On the contrary, their teachers were “proficient” in all aspects besides using cloud storage and using video conferencing tools, which they are “competent.” In this regard, both students and teachers are competent technologically and may be ready for online learning.

This being said, teachers do not only need to be technologically savvy, but they are also required to have special skills that they may need to properly engage and motivate students, especially if they will be making different slides fit for online teaching. In this regard, the teachers are “proficient” in using a camera, “competent” in photo editing and audio recording, and “advanced beginner” in video editing. Having these competencies, it could be assumed that teachers are “proficient” in framing different factors needed for online education. However, though considered to be proficient in technology, their responses describe their hesitance in what lies ahead after the pandemic.

In assumption of equal variances, it can be interpreted that all ICT skills except using different chat applications were significantly different from each other. In contrast, the participants’ expertise in using chat applications like messenger did not have any significant difference with each other.

2.2 Owned devices. A transition to online may be useful with certain limitations as perceived by teachers who have experience in public schools as they explained that “ALS already took up online classes and e-learning only for those who were willing to learn and finish

the program but may impose a greater challenge to those who do not have access to the Internet.” Reimers and Schleicher (2020) mentioned that amidst the challenges, 56.36 per cent of their respondents believed that it was very critical to ensure the continuity of academic learning for students. However, this may be challenging to implement through the lack of technological infrastructure present in each country; 35.75 per cent perceived it to be with some challenges, and 40.90% assumed that it would entail many problems. Also, they have described the challenges in providing both the students and the teachers access to the resources to continue their collaboration using an online platform. Therefore, other modalities should be used in the likes of television, portable radios, radio, podcasts, videos, and different learning packages that can be taken into consideration.

Since online learning may be considered as one of the possible approaches during and after COVID-19, it is imperative to understand the equipment and financial readiness of the stakeholders in this kind of modality.

Table 4
Gadgets Owned by Teachers and Students

Gadget	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
Smart Phone	97.4	95.2
Tablet	22.8	28.6
Laptop Computer	48.2	90.5
Desktop Computer	24.6	14.3

With these data, it can be assumed that the gadgets mostly owned by the teachers and the students were smartphones, which may be used as a tool for education. However, online education success may be doubtful since it has its limitations. “For online education to be successful, computers are suggested to be used.” However, only 48.2 per cent of the students have laptops, and 24.6 per cent owns desktop. Where the students will have to “go to computer rental shops” to accomplish their tasks. With this, some of the participants suggested “the government to buy materials that the



students and teachers will use.” However, if this will not be produced, then there will be “inaccessibility to education,” and there will be “limitations in informal learning opportunities.”

Table 5
School- Loaned Gadgets

Gadget	Teachers (%)
Smart Phone	33.3
Tablet	10.3
Laptop Computer	64.1
Desktop Computer	35.9

In this way, a solution may be provided to the lack of gadgets. However, another dilemma arises from gadget use in online learning which is connectivity. “Internet connection and learning materials that the teachers and students might need will become a burden in the future.”

2.3 Internet Connectivity. The data show the readiness of teachers and students in terms of internet connection and internet speed they have at home. It can be assumed that “the use of the internet is a huge challenge since not all students and even teachers do not have stable access to the internet and these are not free.”

Table 6
Internet Connection and Internet Speed at Home

Internet Connection	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Internet Speed (Mbps)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
Free Data	31.6	15.2	Below 20	37.2	45.7
Broadband Stick	3.5	7.6	20	23.9	25.7
Prepaid WiFi	28.9	25.7	50	18.6	14.3
Fiber Connection	36	51.4	100	7.1	6.7
			Above 100	13.3	7.6

In addition, “students and teachers who do not have e-learning tools might incur additional expense that is a huge amount for everybody considering that not all parents are middle-class income workers; added to that the number of students every family has.”

In the analysis of Dumpit and Fernandez (2017), the frequently used applications by

schools are highly affected by the internet and speed. Thus, a student who does not have access to the Internet or belongs to a low-income family would need to additionally spend on telecommunication load to continue attending classes online. Henceforth, educational equity isn’t favored as to unequal access to technology and adult supervision.

Schools who have been using distance learning suggested that apart from using applications that consume data, a more probable proposition to reach students is the use of social media and other simple web 2.0 or web 3.0 tools. In this way, education continues even for those who have less if a blended instruction will be conducted. To put it simply in the context, it is not how high tech or how low tech the modality is, rather it is the reach, that is more important.

3. Mindset of Teachers

One of the participants made mention that “training how to use online platforms should not be the main concern because it is doable. It may be hard for some, but it is doable. The main priority should be addressing the mindset of educators.” While another participant stated that “teachers should have a mindset that this online learning is emerging as the “new normal.” If we don’t get in, we lose our jobs.” Mindset is considered a concern since most of the teachers are considered to be “digital migrants” having to teach students who are “digital natives,” and some are “born-digitally.” In reality, not all teachers can adapt to the change, especially older teachers (not all but some), the institution may hire young teachers that are more inclined using virtual learning.

In another perspective, the confidence of teachers was also affected, those of the seasoned teachers especially, stating that the “satisfaction of being a teacher (that feeling of fulfillment knowing that your students are happy and learning because of you) will be compromised (trust me, the feeling is different) I’ve been practicing this way of teaching, and I’m telling you students are not that dedicated compared to f2f learning.” With this being said,

teachers' acceptance of what the world sees as the new normal may raise other professional issues mentally, that these instructors may be affected by burnout.

Thus, a challenge was for “teachers to inject their personal touch, especially in gauging the emotional growth of the students.” Another concern was “how to discern if the student will personally be doing the tasks assigned.” Hence, this implies that the conduction of the perceived “new normal” will open issues on integrity and credibility.

Garcia (2017) stated that people, especially students, are not ready for a technological change in the academe. Thus, in his study, he proposed a conceptual model using a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which described different factors that may affect the behavior of both students and teachers who were engaged in the perceived new educational setting. In his model, he had described using three tiers that everything was done in the unique environment that will lead to the intended behavior goal of the stakeholders. It generally proposed that different factors should be considered for a successful education. The first tier suggests that it should focus on multimedia instruction, quality of work, system interactivity. The second tier, on the other hand, should look into internet connectivity, ease of use, usefulness, and social media influence. Both of the tier's factors are interconnected with each other to achieve a success-driven mindset.

4. “New Normal” Model

Putting all data and analysis together, the researcher proposes a model that revolves around the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective parts of the system. In which it moves in one smooth motion, starting from the ICT literacy training of the teachers, evaluation of the stakeholders' educational equity, and re-engineering of the teachers' mindset. Once there is movement in this circle, the other circle moves. This only means that pedagogical innovation, re-evaluation of assessments, the grading system, and the redesigning of the curriculum move simultaneously with the latter. Amongst all of the

parts, nothing stands out or considered as the most important. All parts are vital to the system for it to work and help continue education to what is to come in a post-COVID-19 setting. In which all factors were given more emphasis depending on the focus of the institution.

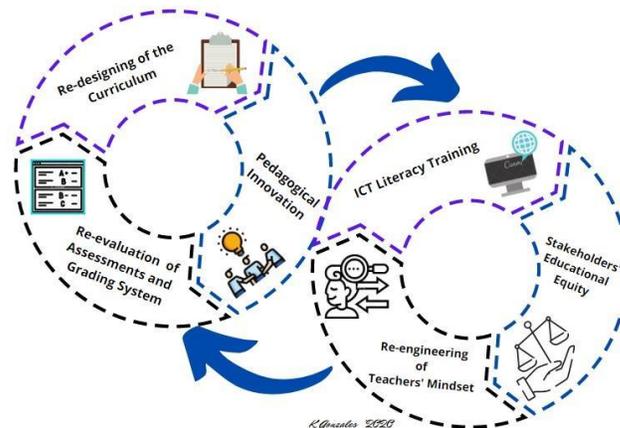


Figure 1. Continuing Education Model in the “New Normal

The proposed model is aligned with the convergence theory of learning, wherein it focuses on the emergence, divergence, and convergence. In this way, the perceived “new normal” setting is approached systematically.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was able to come up with the following conclusions based from its gathered data:

1. Amongst the noted modality in the study, online education is believed to be the education's best weapon amidst the hit of the pandemic.
2. It is imperative to outline and identify the different trainings to be conducted to prepare the teachers. Henceforth, the educational technology team of each institution will be the leading and most important factor in tackling the new normal successfully.
3. Since the country and its students and teachers, as assimilated in the study, have difficulties in connectivity and owned

devices, online education must be re-considered to be the new normal and exploration of new modalities are deemed essential to continue learning for all.

4. The school's implemented curriculum should be revisited and restructured based on what will be the most important to be learned in each subject while depending on it on the modality that will be used.
5. The mode of assessment and grading systems should also be innovated for learning to continue still hitting its knowledge, psychomotor, and affective goals.
6. Teachers mindset is one of the key factor in accepting the new normal and turning all its challenges into opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are derived from the conclusions of the study:

1. To approach the challenge of ICT in-house mentor-mentee programs may be conducted in building champions of the new approach. In this way "digital divide" will be at least minimized in the school's setting.
2. If and so that a blended approach will be considered leaning on more online than face-to-face, the school and the government may have a possible contingency plan in the likely provisions of gadgets and Internet access to their school instructors. If done, teachers will be prevented from leaving their jobs.
3. Though the study is limited to the participants, future researchers may re-conduct the study having more participants than the current research have.
4. To have a better understanding of the current phenomena, schools may conduct a study to determine the challenges, they are facing as an institution as well as the opportunities they have in improving the school's service.
5. Lastly, future researchers may take a look into the contextualization of the curriculum according to each region of the country.

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